

System Configuration Team (SCT)
Reasonable & Prudent Measure #26
Meeting Notes
January 21, 1998

I. Greetings and Introductions.

The January 21 meeting of the System Configuration Team was held at the National Marine Fisheries Service's offices in Portland, Oregon. The meeting was co-chaired by Bill Hevlin of NMFS and Jim Ruff of the Northwest Power Planning Council staff. The agenda and a list of attendees for the January 21 meeting are attached as Enclosures A and B.

The following is a distillation (not a verbatim transcript) of items discussed at the meeting, together with actions taken on those items. Please note that some enclosures referenced may be too lengthy to routinely include with the meeting notes; copies of all enclosures referred to in the minutes are available upon request from Kathy Ceballos of NMFS at 503/230-5420.

II. Progress Update on the Council/ISAB Review of Corps' Mainstem Capital Construction Program.

Ruff distributed Enclosure C, a document entitled "Scope of Work -- Council and ISAB Review of Corps's Capital Construction Program," dated January 13, 1998. I am happy to report that the Council has approved the capital construction review scope of work, he began; our first technical meeting with the ISAB was held yesterday. Ruff went quickly through Enclosure C, pointing out areas that were changed in response to comments received.

At yesterday's meeting, we were only able to spend a few minutes on each of the presentations, Ruff continued -- it was essentially an overview, with an extensive amount of written material provided for later review. It will be up to the ISAB to contact those involved in the actual projects if they have further questions. At the next ISAB meeting, probably in the third week of February, we will be talking about Bonneville Dam JBS improvements, the Dissolved Gas Abatement Program, and adult fish passage, Ruff said.

Ron Boyce of ODFW asked who will be modeling the impacts of specific projects, such as the Bonneville Dam JBS improvements, on system survival, and, alternately, on smolt-to-adult returns. I don't believe the ISAB will have that capability, Ruff replied -- personally, I think that PATH will be the best forum for that work. I'll talk it over with Oregon's Council representatives and get their thoughts, said Boyce.

Any other comments on yesterday's meeting? Ruff asked. Only that there was an incredible amount of information presented, and I'm not sure how the ISAB is going to deal with it, said Mike Mason of the Corps. As far as the policy issues connected with this review, said Ruff, the Council will be taking those up, and I will be providing regular briefings here at SCT -- we have agreed to use this as the technical forum.

III. Review Final Adjustments to FY'98 CRFM Program.

At the last SCT meeting, said Hevlin, we spent quite a bit of time discussing whether or not to fund the Bonneville predator/prey study. My understanding is that PATH has said the predator/prey study is something that it is really needed, said Witt Anderson of the Corps. Based on that, we're assuming that we are going to fund this study, he said. Chris Toole of NMFS said PATH definitely supports this research; it looks as though it will be able to produce preliminary results available in time to incorporate in PATH's fall chinook analysis. There has been some discussion of deferring the Hanford Reach portion of the study as a cost-saving measure, Toole said; based on my discussions with other PATH members, the group can probably live without that portion of the research if absolutely necessary. In response to a question, he added that the Hanford Reach portion accounts for about \$100,000 of the \$380,000 total cost of the study in FY'98.

My feeling is that, if PATH wants this study, we'll find a way to fund it, Anderson said. There are a lot of funding adjustments going on, as always at this point in the process, with bids coming in and contract amounts starting to change slightly; the plan at this point is for Greg Graham to look for a place within the Lower Snake Feasibility Study where he can add this predator/prey study in, Anderson said. The Corps is comfortable recognizing that funding the predator/prey study may pose some risk to other projects later in FY'98; the bottom line is that, in a \$98 million budget, there is a lot of savings and slippage that occurs, and we should be able to find the money for this study, without causing too much pain later. I should add that there is one other item the Corps is committed to finding funds for in FY'98, Anderson added -- we want to be sure that the John Day smolt monitoring facility is up and running this year. That means we'll need to find another \$300,000 somewhere in the budget.

Were there any major developments at yesterday's Decision Process Coordinating Group meeting that we should know about? Hevlin asked. The main thing that occurred yesterday was that Dave Marmorek ran through the format for the spring/summer chinook report PATH will be giving to the Implementation Team in February, Toole replied. He didn't provide any actual data from the PATH analysis; the main purpose of this presentation was to get feedback on the way that information will be presented to the decision makers. The remainder of the meeting was taken up by a discussion of the changes and comments to the draft decision document Ed Sheets has been working on, Toole continued. That document will also be presented at the February IT meeting, as well as the February Executive Committee meeting. Most of this discussion focused on what exactly the decision is, and who will make it -- how does the Corps's Lower Snake Feasibility Study fit in with NMFS's ESA responsibilities and all of the other considerations for other species? Basically, the question was, who is going to make what decision, and how will everything be coordinated? Toole said. That wasn't resolved at the meeting, but it was identified as a key issue for the IT to consider.

There was also some discussion of the 10 alternatives for analysis included in the letter from Will Stelle to Steve Crow, Hevlin said; most of this discussion focused on the additional flow augmentation question, and where that should fit in with the other modeling priorities. We're in the process of putting together an updated series of market prices, which is probably the most critical assumption to be used in the modeling effort, Ruff said. Once we have that information, we will be able to get those studies underway, probably in mid-February. However, this request will have to be fit in with our other priorities, and we will need to have a discussion with NMFS

about their highest priorities for analysis. In response to a question from Anderson, Hevlin said the main purpose of the NMFS letter was to get another perspective on operations costs from the Council.

As an addendum to this item, Anderson distributed copies of the Corps' final work plans for the Turbine Passage Survival Study and McNary Extended-Length Screen installation. These are primarily for your information, he said; as things change, we will provide updates for you to attach to these documents. This is very useful information, Ruff added – the Corps has done a nice job of summarizing the status of these projects.

IV. Gas Abatement Plan Development – Update.

As most of you will recall, Hevlin said, this was an assignment from the Jan. 8 IT meeting. Brian Brown wrote a memo to Jim Ruff and myself describing this task; basically, we were asked to pull the items that have to do with gas abatement out of our FY'98 program as the starting point for a gas abatement plan; we were also asked to carry this exercise forward into the future. We've got a pretty good idea about what's going to happen in FY'98 and '99, but after that, there are some pretty big question marks, Hevlin said.

In addition to that, said Mark Schneider, co-chair of the DGT, a few weeks ago, the Washington Department of Ecology wrote a letter which outlined recent changes to their rule language, particularly to those sections dealing with the annual waiver process for dissolved gas. As most of you are aware, in the past, it has been necessary for NMFS to apply for an annual waiver for the Washington State TDG standard in order to implement the BiOp spill program.

The rule that had governed that has now been changed, Schneider continued; rather than an annual paper process, it is now more of an approval process. In order to obtain approval for the spill program, Washington is requiring us to produce three documents: first, a biological monitoring program, second, a physical monitoring program, and third, a gas abatement plan, which includes specific gas abatement actions and a timetable for implementing them.

We talked about this at last week's IT meeting, Schneider continued, and the conclusion was that, for this year, the first step toward a gas abatement plan will be for the SCT to develop a list of the gas abatement actions that have been prioritized for funding within the FY'98 and FY'99 CRFM programs -- those items that affect dissolved gas in the river due to spill. That, I assume, is the task before us today, he said. What we're really after is a schedule of milestones on the way to compliance with the 110% standard, said Eric Schlörff of WDOE, recognizing that some specifics may be lacking after FY '99.

Certainly we can describe the various system configuration scenarios under consideration for the post-1999 period, as well as the bookends for potential gas abatement activities within each of those scenarios, said Fred Olney of the Fish and Wildlife Service. The Three Sovereigns work group has been discussing the costs associated with what we are calling the "low-end" dissolved gas abatement scenario; there is also a great deal of interest in developing a more specific "high end" gas abatement scenario. It would probably be a good idea to spend a few minutes at today's meeting talking about what that "high end" scenario might look like, Olney said.

In response to a question from Ruff, Schlörff said a brief list of the specific gas abatement-related measures in the FY'98 and FY'99 CRFM programs would provide a good starting point

for the long-term gas abatement plan. Boyce pointed out that the specific dissolved gas reductions associated with each of the gas abatement alternatives under consideration are still being studied by Northwest Hydraulics; I hope that WDOE will understand that, for now at least, it will be difficult to provide definitive information about the specific dissolved gas reductions each of these alternatives will provide, he said. We understand that, Schlorff said, but we are looking for a commitment on the part of the federal agencies to making progress toward permanent and meaningful reductions in total dissolved gas.

It is difficult for anyone to make firm commitments at this point, Anderson said -- it all depends on what system configuration decision is made in 1999. All we're looking for is a commitment that you will continue to try to abate gas, Schlorff said -- I didn't say by how much. Did the IT agree with that? Anderson asked. I believe so, Schneider replied.

What we need to talk about today is how best to develop a short-term and a long-term work plan to satisfy WDOE's requirements, Ruff said. The tools and information are available, and to me, this doesn't seem like an extremely onerous task. All we really need is a short briefing paper or work plan; we have been working with the Three Sovereigns workgroup to identify potential long-term options, including a range of gas abatement alternatives. I agree, said Anderson -- we've got FY'98 and FY'99, and we have a list of possible gas abatement measures for the out years. As long as we are clear about the fact that a great deal of uncertainty exists beyond 1999, I don't see a problem with that approach, agreed Olney.

After some minutes of further discussion, it was agreed to form an SCT/DGT workgroup to provide WDOE with the information they require. The group will consist of Ruff, Rock Peters, Schlorff, Kim Fodrea, Olney, Mary Lou Soscia, Boyce, Hevlin, Schneider, Jim Nielsen of WDFW, Gene Foster of ODEQ, Dave Zimmer of the Bureau of Reclamation, Margaret Filardo of the Fish Passage Center and, if possible, Bob Heinith of CRITFC, with Schneider taking the lead. The subgroup was scheduled to meet on Tuesday, Feb. 3 at 1 p.m. at NMFS' Portland offices; the goal of this meeting will be to produce a concise summary of the gas abatement measures and studies on the books for FY'98 and FY'99, as well as a description of what the "low-end" and "high-end" gas abatement option for the out-years might include. We'll discuss what the subgroup comes up with at the February 18 SCT meeting, with the goal of completing the plan prior to the March IT meeting, said Hevlin.

V. SCT Criteria for Prioritizing CRFM Program Items.

At the December SCT meeting, I asked everyone to look over the list of prioritization criteria we developed in February 1996, and to rank and weight each of the criteria on the list in terms of their importance, Hevlin said. After that, we were going to submit this list to the Council, telling them that these are the criteria the SCT has used and will use to prioritize items within the CRFM budget.

Unfortunately, Hevlin said, Jim Ruff was the only one who completed this assignment. Hevlin distributed Enclosure H, a revised version of the criteria list reflecting Ruff's comments. The group spent a few minutes discussing this document and the methodology to be used in weighting and ranking the list (whether separate sets of criteria should be applied to the ranking of implementation items and to studies, and, if so, how would the two categories of items be ranked against one another to develop the prioritized CRFM program, for example). Eventually,

Hevlin asked the other SCT participants to review this revised list, and to submit any additional comments, rankings or weights to him by February 5. I'll compile the results, he said, and we can discuss this further at our February meeting.

VI. FY'99 CRFM Program.

The President's FY'99 budget request is due out in February, said Anderson -- to me, it makes more sense to spend our time arguing the dollars and cents of the FY'99 CRFM program once we see the President's budget. After a fair amount of internal discussion, we think we can do a better job of integrating our total program, he said -- the workplan, the elements of the workplan, AFEP, design, everything that goes into all of these measures that we're carrying out. We would like to be able to pull that together, while at the same time integrating some of the comments you guys have been giving us, Anderson said. With that in mind, we sat down about a week ago to try to hash some of these things out; the result is (Enclosure I), a first draft of an integrated FY'99 AFEP/CRFM planning schedule, showing key dates in the work plan and CRFM prioritization process. In a perfect world, Anderson said, this is what we would like to try to do in FY'99.

Anderson spent a few minutes going through this schedule; the bottom line, he said, is that, by mid-May, the regional review of the FY'99 work plans would be completed, and the districts will begin soliciting actual proposals from the researchers. When does SCT need to start focusing on FY'99 priorities? Hevlin asked -- I don't see that here. I presume it starts at your March meeting, and continues through October 1, replied Mike Mason. So we will need to devote our April meeting to a discussion of at least broad FY'99 priorities, to identify any serious bones of contention, Hevlin said. According to this schedule, yes, Anderson replied. In response to another question, Anderson asked that any SCT comments on this schedule be submitted to him prior to the next SCT meeting.

One other thing to bear in mind, Anderson said -- the Corps will also be heading into its FY'00 budget cycle shortly. Ideally, we would like our FY'00 work plans to reflect the input we receive on the MOA, from this group and others. The work plans really need to look into the future. Because of the 1999 decision, that isn't going to be easy to do, observed Ruff. Agreed, Anderson said.

VII. Progress Update on John Day Sampler.

There have been a number of discussions over the past month with regard to the John Day sampler, said Bob Willis of the Corps. He distributed Enclosure D, a document titled "Follow-On Contract Phase 1 List of Items," explaining that Phase 1 includes those activities that need to be completed prior to April 1 in order for this facility to be operational prior to the 1998 migration season. Phase 2 activities cover actual operations during the 1998 fiscal year, Willis said. Phase 3 covers the activities that will be accomplished during the FY'99 in-water work period.

The Phase 1 list includes 11 items, Willis continued; that number may change, but this is what we're looking at right now, and we are currently moving out on the list. We expect that all of these items will be completed prior to the migration season. Does the additional \$300,000 include all three phases of this project? Ruff asked. It does not include Phase 2 or Phase 3,

Willis replied. If you will recall from our last meeting, Anderson said, the funding for this item was cut from \$1.4 million to \$930,000. What we're now saying is that \$930,000 is too low, and we will need about \$1.2 million to complete Phases 1 and 2; it is possible, however, that there will be additional fiscal needs beyond the \$1.2 million in FY'98, he said. But by April 1, the smolt facility will be fully operational? asked Boyce. Yes, Willis replied. We'll keep you updated as this project progresses, added Anderson.

VIII. FFDRWG and AFEP Updates.

No AFEP or FFDRWG update was presented at today's meeting.

IX. Next SCT Meeting Date and Agenda Items.

The next meeting of the System Configuration Team was set for Wednesday, February 18 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in NMFS's Portland offices. The March SCT meeting was set for Thursday, March 19; the April meeting was set for Thursday, April 16; the May SCT meeting was set for Thursday, May 21; the June SCT meeting was set for Thursday, June 18. It was agreed that, at the February meeting, the SCT will hear a presentation on gas abatement plans at Grand Coulee and Chief Joseph Dams. Meeting notes prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.